

BQ

BIDDING QUARTERLY

FRICITIONLESS

ISSUE NO. 25
JUNE 2026



THE STAKEHOLDER ISSUE



Brought to you by

Bid Solutions
Connecting Winners

CONTENTS

IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S ME. (BUT MOSTLY IT'S YOU...)

Martin Smith 3

STAKEHOLDERS, SEAGULLS AND SURVIVAL

Nigel Dennis 4

THERE IS NO "THEM" IN A WINNING BID

Javier Escartin 5

"US VS THEM" DOESN'T WIN CONTRACTS - ALIGNMENT DOES

Rebecca Link 6

LOVE THE WAY YOU MOVE (FORWARD AS A TEAM)

Alana McCarthy 7

THE PROPOSAL TEAM IS NOT THE RESCUE TEAM

Larissa Cornelius 8

FIX STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT UPSTREAM

Jeremy Brim 9

NEVER PARACHUTE BID WRITERS

Pippa Birch 10

STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT VS STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Nina Christiansen 11

FROM FRICTION TO FLOW

Rita Mascia 12

HARNESSING THE POWER

Andy Haigh 13

THE BIDDING CHAMELEON

Michael Brown 14

BIDDING LESSONS FROM A VIENNESE PALACE

Jon Williams 15

UNCORK THE SME BOTTLENECK AND COLLABORATE SMARTER

Darrell Woodward 16

FINDING A RHYTHM

Bella Stevenson 17

WHY OPERATIONAL TEAMS MATTER IN REBIDS

Nigel Thacker 18

CORE STRENGTH

Sarah Hinchliffe 19

"TELL US HOW TO MAKE THIS BETTER"

Tony Birch 20

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING IS IN THE WRITING

Jim Carley 21

BEYOND THE KEYBOARD: WHY HUMAN CONNECTION STILL WINS BIDS

Ken Erskine 22

COACHING - ACTION THROUGH UNDERSTANDING

Gemma Waring 23

WHY STAKEHOLDERS DON'T DO WHAT YOU ASKED

Ceri Mescall 24

ABOUT OUR EXPERTS

25

IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S ME.

But mostly it's you...

FOREWORD BY

Martin Smith

I have noticed a rising tide of “us vs them” rhetoric in our industry forums – bid professionals battling with Sales, SMEs, Procurement, and C-level colleagues – that undermines the reality of how great bids are won and risks longer-term reputational damage to our profession. This milestone 25th issue of BQ aims to provide the antidote to this rhetoric, exploring the essential craft of stakeholder management.

The story begins by retiring an old habit. Javier Escartin reminds us there is no “them” in a winning bid. Nigel Dennis shows that calm process beats heroic chaos every single time, and Alana McCarthy demonstrates how a team moving forward together earns a real competitive edge. Rebecca Link points out that the “us vs. them” narrative in GovCon isn’t new, it’s just loud, leaving proposal teams feeling underappreciated.

Timing comes next. Jeremy Brim and Larissa Cornelius both argue the real work happens long before kick-off – in targeting, capture and qualification. Pippa Birch

warns against the parachute model of bid writing and champions year-round relationships instead.

A clear distinction then emerges. Nina Christiansen draws the line between stakeholder management – the structural discipline – and stakeholder engagement, which is altogether deeper and more transformative. Rita Mascia complements this beautifully, showing how empathy, recognition and leadership visibility convert friction into flow.

From there we move into tailoring. Andy Haigh decodes the hidden agendas of every group around the bid table. Michael Brown introduces the bidding chameleon – flexibility as competitive edge. Jon Williams takes us all the way to Vienna’s Imperial Hotel for a masterclass in delighting every stakeholder, every time.

The specialists get their own spotlight. Darrell Woodward proposes curated knowledge bases that ask for an SME’s judgement rather than their time. Bella Stevenson finds the right rhythm with technical experts.

Nigel Thacker turns the spotlight on operational teams, whose buy-in so often makes or breaks a rebid.

Then the bid team itself takes centre stage. Sarah Hinchliffe builds her pursuits around a tight core team. Tony Birch shows how a “tell us how to make this better” mindset transforms reviews. Jim Carley exposes the small but mighty discipline of better proofreading.

We close on the soft skills. Gemma Waring shares coaching techniques that flip difficult conversations into productive ones. Ceri Mescall borrows from behavioural economics to explain why stakeholders behave the way they do. And Ken Erskine reminds us that, after all the technology, people still buy from people.

Across twenty distinctive voices, the same encouraging message emerges. Stakeholder management is not a battle to be fought but a craft to be practised. With trust, empathy, structure and a little well-directed curiosity, every bid will become easier to win.



STAKEHOLDERS, SEAGULLS AND SURVIVAL

NIGEL DENNIS

Anyone who has worked on a major bid knows that proposals are rarely derailed by formatting or grammar. More often, they are weakened by conflicting stakeholder opinions, unclear decision-making and last-minute interventions from people who suddenly become “deeply interested” just hours before submission. In bidding, stakeholder management is not a soft skill – it is a survival skill.

the difference between strategic feedback and personal preference. Most importantly, define what “good” looks like before the pressure hits.

Ambiguity breeds drama. Executives rarely want a 90-page draft with “thoughts?”. They want concise summaries, key risks and clear decisions.

BEWARE THE FLOCKING SEAGULLS

Every experienced bid professional knows the species. Senior stakeholders who arrive late, often uninvited, make a lot of noise, scatter comments and then fly off leaving the bid team to clean up the mess.

The challenge is real. Late executive input often creates confusion, rework and stress at the worst possible moment.

The key is prevention, not confrontation. Engage senior stakeholders early with short, structured touchpoints. Give them binary decisions to make, not blank pages. Most executives want to help, but without structure they can unintentionally destabilise a bid.

The best teams do not treat the review process as an open invitation for derailment. They treat it as a decision point, to be captured and closed out before the next wave of opinions arrives.

TOO MANY CAPTAINS

Another trap is assuming a correlation between number of reviewers and proposal quality. In reality, large review groups generate contradictory feedback, rewrites and decision paralysis. In every case, small, accountable review teams trump sprawling committees.

The best bid leaders are not just document managers or writers. They are facilitators, negotiators and, occasionally, referees.

At the end of the day, bidding survival is straightforward: too many cooks do not just spoil the broth – they become experts in strategy, structure and persuasion. And by that stage, you are no longer managing a bid... you are managing opinions with deadlines attached.

Clarity is the key currency here. In a live pursuit, calm process coupled with great expectation setting beats heroic chaos. Every. Single. Time.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS – BIDDING STYLE

One of the most common causes of bid friction is unmanaged expectations. At the start of a pursuit, optimism is high. Everyone promises collaboration and quick reviews. Then reality arrives. Deadlines compress. SMEs disappear into customer meetings. Executives suddenly want “just a few small changes” the night before submission.

The bid team quickly ends up managing emotions as much as documents.

The solution is practical. Set clear expectations early. Define who owns decisions. Clarify review timelines. Explain

THERE IS NO “THEM” IN A WINNING BID

I understand why “us vs them” rhetoric keeps surfacing in our profession. It is familiar, emotionally satisfying, and often rooted in real frustration. I have leaned into that angle myself many times, both on LinkedIn and in my newsletter. Anyone who has worked in bids long enough has felt the pain: Sales introduces an opportunity too late, SMEs go quiet when you need them most, executives arrive at the end with major changes, and procurement seems determined to make an already difficult process harder.

Those frustrations are real. But I think there is a deeper and more useful truth behind them.

The “us vs them” mindset may help us vent, but it does very little to help us win. Great bids are not won by one function heroically compensating for everyone else. They are won when different parts of the business align around the opportunity

and contribute in a coordinated way, even under pressure and with incomplete information.

That is why I no longer think the biggest problem is bad intent (yes, even from procurement) and why I think the norm is that everybody is protecting their area of the business while making decisions with partial visibility, just like we (the bid team) are.

In practice, this means the real issue is often not people but weak collaboration design, which is about best practices (engage earlier, provide better context, clarify roles, ask sharper questions, etc.) – but also something else. Best practices still matter a lot, but experience has taught me that they only work consistently when trust underpins them. A good stakeholder approach that builds and maintains trust starts with adaptation.

With Sales, the conversation should focus on momentum, choices, and win strategy. With SMEs, it should be precise, respectful, and tied to a meaningful outcome. With Executives, managing up means filtering complexity and presenting clear options, not escalating noise. With junior colleagues or direct reports, it means reducing ambiguity, removing blockers, and creating conditions for good work.

Many common friction points in the bid lifecycle come from ignoring this. We ask without context. We overuse urgency. We involve people too late. We forget to close the loop after

submission. Over time, those habits damage trust – and once trust is weakened, every future bid becomes harder.

This is why I believe the future of bid leadership is less about chasing content and more about building trust. In the AI era, bid professionals will spend less time producing first drafts under pressure. The real value shift is toward orchestrating people, judgement, relationships, trust, and strategy around the opportunity.

It is more than a soft skill. It is a win skill.

Because there is no “them” in a winning bid.





“US VS THEM” DOESN’T WIN CONTRACTS - ALIGNMENT DOES

REBECCA LINK

The “us vs. them” narrative in GovCon isn’t new, it’s just loud. Proposal managers feel underappreciated, BD teams are grinding to make opportunities real, and leadership is focused on the bottom line. Everyone’s under pressure, just in different ways, and most of the friction comes from not understanding that reality. The fix isn’t complicated, but it does require intention.

Strong stakeholder management starts with actually getting to know the people you work with – not just what they do, but how they operate and what they’re dealing with. When you have that foundation, tough conversations become a lot more productive and a lot less personal. Process matters too. Clear roles, defined workflows, and shared expectations keep teams aligned and accountable, but they only work if everyone is brought in early and stays engaged throughout. Capture shouldn’t live in a vacuum, proposals shouldn’t be an afterthought, and BD shouldn’t be guessing what’s realistic... this has to be a

continuous, overlapping effort if you want a coherent, competitive submission. Most of the common friction points in the bid lifecycle are predictable and, frankly, preventable when teams communicate early and often. Just as important is recognizing capacity. Burnout is real in this industry, and expecting people to juggle multiple high-stakes efforts at 100% isn’t a strategy – it’s a risk. At the end of the day, this is a small community, and reputations stick. You can’t afford to burn bridges.

Success in this space comes down to adaptability and emotional intelligence as much as technical skill. You have to know when to push, when to flex, and how to work with a wide range of personalities. I like to say it’s a bit like being a Payday bar – you need the right mix of sweet and salty to make it work! Get that balance right, and you won’t just reduce friction, you will build teams that actually win together.



I LOVE THE WAY YOU MOVE

ALANA
MCCARTHY



(FORWARD AS A TEAM)

Sitting in my office on the threshold of a sunny bank holiday weekend, I am contemplating why the process of producing a great bid is often fraught with stakeholder adversity. The “dominant logic” is:

- SMEs fail to see the criticality and do not reciprocate our effort
- Senior management do not view us as revenue generating (consider yourself prioritised accordingly)
- Client procurement teams are hellbent on being perpetual chaos goblins, wholly inconsiderate of bidders’ needs

We are expected to do “whatever it takes” to win, and we rely on our stakeholders to get us there, but the expectation on others sometimes does not feel the same. We are left feeling short-changed and hard done by. Here are some practical ways we can start to move forward:

1. Capacity is only part of the problem, but sound managerial practices can help. Make bid/no bid

decisions based on the capacity of SMEs and senior leaders, rather than just the bid team. Set expectations for senior leaders, giving them appropriate time to review responses even if it means drip-feeding individual questions. As someone whose diary typically leaves an hour for “work” a day, I appreciate this method far more than having a 200-page bid to read over the weekend. Caveat: there will always be leaders who swoop in at the last minute and offer insight that is as useful as an ashtray on a motorcycle.

2. Even the most sophisticated planning tools will fail if you do not have SME support. Implement a “no blank page policy”, appreciating that many SMEs will not know where to start when it comes to providing content. Either write the response and ask your SME to review or, better still, go and meet them in person. Be a journalist for the day. Record the conversation so you can fully engage. Ask the probing questions: What do you do? What is the benefit to the client? What are the

challenges and how do you overcome them? What are you adding that the client technically is not paying for? And what have your past outcomes been? These are all great questions. Come with biscuits; build a relationship. When you facilitate rather than demand, great things start to happen.

3. Put the person back into procurement. Procurement teams, particularly in the public sector, are under pressure. They are operating in typically dysfunctional environments and feel the same deadline strains as you. Yes, they release tenders on 15th December with a 10th January return, and yes, they will extend that deadline the day before submission. It is often not their choice though.

It is worth putting the effort in because winning is very difficult when stakeholder relationships are dysfunctional. Competitive advantage is perhaps not always in the products or services that we sell, but in the way that we move forward as a team.



THE PROPOSAL TEAM IS NOT THE RESCUE TEAM

LARISSA CORNELIUS



Many proposal teams excel at saving the day, and that may be part of the problem.

Last-minute heroics can look impressive. The late nights, miracle rewrite, pricing scramble and final review that somehow turns into a strategy session all create the sense that the bid team “pulled it off”. In reality, rescue-mode bidding often hides a deeper issue: weak opportunity ownership.

Often it exposes gaps in the business development process. For many, it shows that the team did not qualify the opportunity properly. It likely reveals that the right people never had the time, scope or buy-in to contribute before the deadline became uncomfortable.

Sales, SMEs, executives, finance, legal and operations often do not fail because they do not care. They fail because the process did not make their roles, timing and decisions clear enough. They also juggle multiple priorities, meetings, clients, delivery issues and internal pressures. Many organisations expect people to support critical deals without giving them the space to do it well. That sets good people up to fail and leaves the proposal team to catch the pieces.

Proposal teams still need to own what sits within their control. They do this by setting expectations early, making risks visible, asking better questions and not treating unclear strategy, late inputs and vague reviews as normal. They should not carry the whole pursuit alone.

Winning businesses make opportunity ownership a shared discipline. They prioritise the right stakeholders before the pressure hits and give people the time, context and authority to contribute meaningfully. They also understand that every delayed

decision creates pressure somewhere else in the process.

We can shift this by looking at stakeholder engagement in three moments.

BEFORE THE RFP

This is where the real work starts. What customer problem are we solving? Why can we solve it better than others? What value should the client clearly see? Without this, what are we actually writing?

DURING THE BID, BEFORE KICK-OFF

The bid team should confirm the process, roles, timing, decision points and risks. Stakeholders should know what they need to provide, by when, and why it matters. SMEs should not receive blank sections and hopeful calendar invites. They should receive annotated outlines and focused questions that draw out proof, differentiation and delivery evidence.

AFTER SUBMISSION

Lessons learnt should not become a blame ritual. The team should identify what worked, what failed, where ownership broke down and, most importantly, what actions must change before the next opportunity.

When proposal teams keep rescuing the process, they rarely gain the recognition that rescue should bring. More often, they absorb the pressure, protect the deadline and quietly carry the consequences of decisions made too late.

The strongest proposal teams do not keep rescuing broken processes. They help build stronger ones where all stakeholders become co-owners of the win.

FIX STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT UPSTREAM

JEREMY BRIM

In my experience, most stakeholder engagement problems at the bid stage are symptoms of bigger, earlier causes. By the time a bid team is chasing SMEs, attempting to engage with Sales or trying to align Execs in the bid phase, the real issue has already happened upstream – in targeting, in key account management and in capture.

We need to stop treating stakeholder engagement as a bid-stage activity if we want fewer firefights, fewer blockers and fewer “us vs them” moments. The earlier we engage, the easier everything becomes.

THE REAL PITFALL: ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS TOO LATE

Bid teams often inherit a situation where:

- Sales have (at best) already shaped the deal without insight
- SMEs are surprised by the opportunity
- Delivery teams have not been consulted on feasibility

- Execs only appear at the red review stage
- Procurement is treated as an obstacle, not a partner

None of this is a stakeholder management problem. It is a timing and focus problem. When engagement begins at the kick-off, you are already compensating for misalignment that is months old.

HOW GETTING UPSTREAM DIFFUSES FRICTION

Something powerful happens when organisations invest in market insight, considered targeting, KAM, and capture:

- Stakeholders understand the opportunity before it becomes a bid
- Risks are surfaced early, not 48 hours before submission
- SMEs contribute to shaping a valuable solution, not just filling gaps
- Execs see the strategic context, not just the cost

- Bid teams stop chasing and start leading/shaping

Early engagement creates shared ownership and trust. And trust removes 80% of the friction we see in the bid room.

A PRACTICAL UPSTREAM ENGAGEMENT MODEL

We use a simple funnel-based approach with our clients:

Market Insight – Targeting – KAM – Capture – Bid

At each stage, stakeholder engagement has a different purpose:

- Market insight – alignment on where the organisation can win profitable and sustainable work
- Targeting – bring sponsors, sales, delivery, and finance into the decision on which opportunities matter

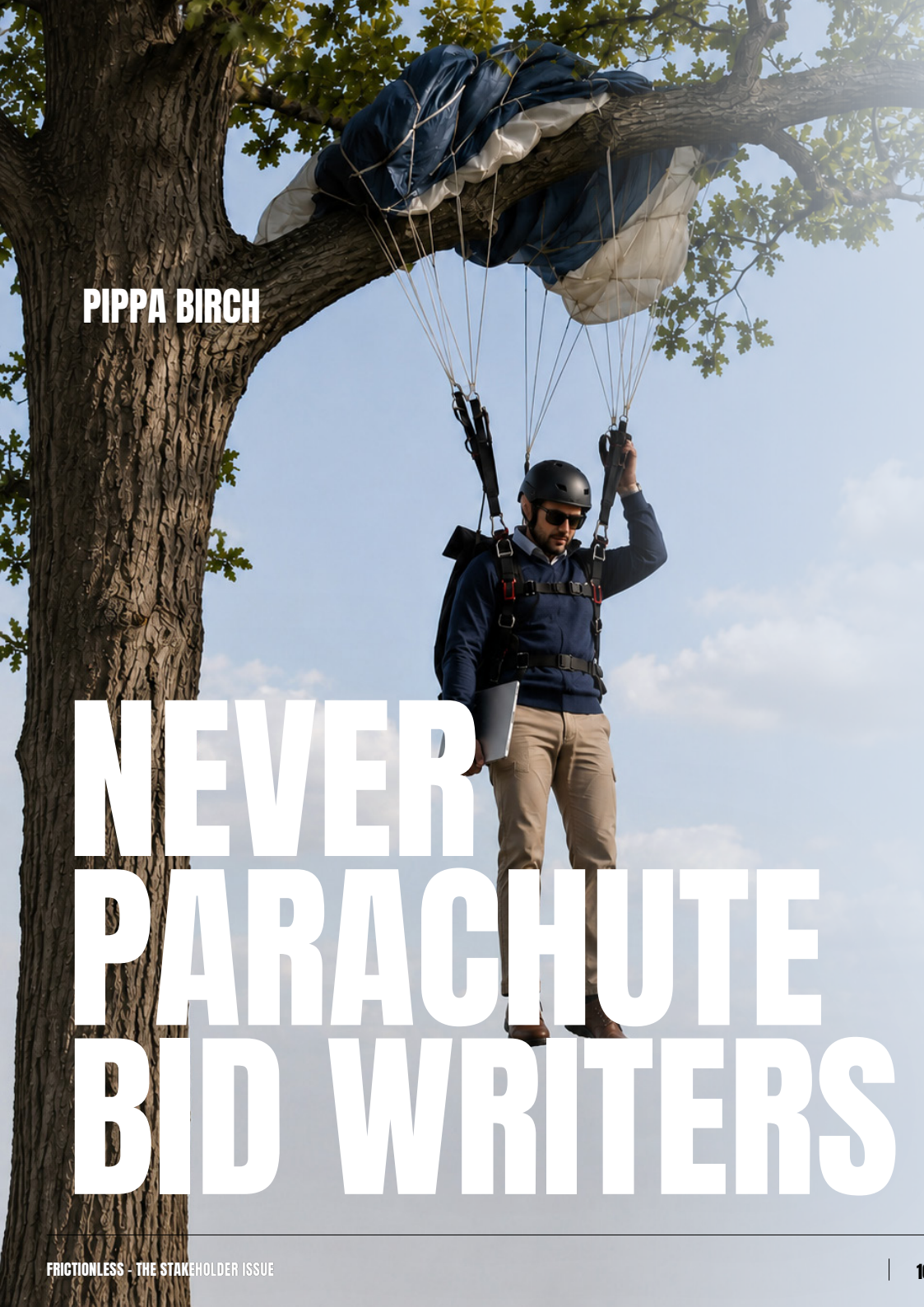
- KAM – build relationships that reduce surprises and increase long-range intelligence (and repeat business)
- Capture – collaborate to co-create the most valuable solutions with clients and your aligned team
- Bid – execute, refine and close the deal smoothly, not in a scramble

We should never submit a proposal to strangers. By the time the bid starts, the hard work is already done.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Stakeholder engagement is not a bid skill. It is a growth-system imperative.

We need to move the conversation upstream – where relationships are built, expectations are set and winning actually begins – if we want fewer conflicts and more wins with less friction.



PIPPA BIRCH

NEVER PARACHUTE BID WRITERS

"RELATIONSHIPS ARE WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT. IF WE CAN CREATE A VERY GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIP, YOU START TO TRUST SOMEONE AND THEN YOU CAN BUILD THAT RELATIONSHIP."

So said one of our clients in a recent Impact Survey. The feedback provided was overwhelmingly about the positive relationships we create with our clients' stakeholders. In our case, stakeholders are not only those immediately involved in bid management, but also operational and support staff, the supply chain, and various SMEs throughout each business.

How do we create these relationships? We are not parachute bid writers, who waft in and out for each bid. We always get fully involved with clients and their stakeholders, whether there is a live bid or not. We become a friend and ally, as invested in the success of the company as they are.

What we do as consultants translates into strategies for internal bid teams working with their own set of stakeholders:

- Treat stakeholder relationships as long-term assets, not bid-stage necessities: Relationships are continuous, whether there is a live bid or not. Be part of the ecosystem, not just the bid.
- Prioritise genuine human connection over transactional engagement: Invest time in understanding your stakeholders, remembering and responding to personal preferences and pressures to build authentic rapport.
- Listen more than you speak: Seek to understand stakeholder drivers, constraints, and unspoken concerns, adapting your approach to what they need, not what you assume.

- Maintain consistency across every touchpoint: All stakeholders should get the same professionalism, tone, and quality from everyone in your team.
- Be honest: Transparent, even uncomfortable, conversations can bring the best out of stakeholders, building credibility over time. Never overpromise or say what you think stakeholders want to hear.
- Add value even when there is no immediate return: Keep building relationships away from formal bids, sharing insights and perspectives, and keeping in touch without expecting anything in return.
- Be memorable – in a good way: Bring your energy and personality into the relationship, balancing professionalism with warmth and individuality.
- Reflect and improve after every interaction: Learn from feedback, outcomes, and subtle signals, building a continual improvement mindset into how you operate.

I would urge you all to adopt the same approach – your stakeholders are people with their own pressures. As you would make it easier for an evaluator to give you the highest marks for your quality submission, make it easy for your stakeholders to give you the most valuable input. By creating authentic stakeholder relationships and delivering value beyond the bid itself, you will create meaningful partnerships that last long beyond contract award. Ultimately this will enable you, as a team, to create those winning bid submissions.

STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT VS STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



In bid environments, “stakeholder” is used constantly, and often loosely. We talk about managing, engaging, and mapping stakeholders as though these are the same thing. They are not. The distinction between stakeholder management and stakeholder engagement is subtle, but significant. In a complex bid, particularly one involving two organisations, getting it wrong can undermine the strongest proposal.

Stakeholder management is the structural discipline. It means identifying who has an interest in the bid outcome, assessing influence and expectations, and ensuring they are kept informed, aligned, and involved. In practice, this means mapping internal, client-side, and partner stakeholders; understanding priorities and concerns; planning communications; tracking contributions; and ensuring approvals happen on time. Done well, it prevents things from falling through the cracks. It is the backbone of a well-run bid. But it is also transactional. Management asks: who needs to know what, and when?

Stakeholder engagement goes deeper. It means understanding what stakeholders truly care about, building trust, and shaping the solution and narrative so they resonate. It is less about keeping people informed and more about bringing them with you. In a bid, engagement means listening before writing, understanding the client’s real priorities, building trust across boundaries, helping SMEs and partners see why their input matters, and sustaining momentum. Engagement asks: what does this person care about, and how do we make them feel part of this? In a fast-moving bid, it is tempting to default to management alone. There are deadlines to hit, registers to maintain, and content to chase. Engagement can feel like a luxury. It is not.

When stakeholders are only managed, they provide what is asked, when asked. When engaged, they contribute with ownership. They think beyond their section, ask better questions, catch misalignments early, and advocate for the bid in rooms the bid manager never enters. This is especially important in partnership bids. Each organisation brings

approvers, SMEs, decision-makers, and internal politics. A bid may fail because stakeholders never fully trust each other, or because each side prioritises its own agenda over the shared client story. That is why early engagement matters. The goal is not simply to inform partner stakeholders of the plan, but to invite them into it.

Start with a stakeholder landscape, not just a list. Map influence, alignment, tension, and relationships. Tailor communication by stakeholder type. Schedule engagement conversations, not just content check-ins. Create shared visibility through joint kick-offs and narrative workshops. The aim of stakeholder management is a well-run bid. The aim of stakeholder engagement is a bid that wins. Both matter. Neither is sufficient alone.

Done well, the result is a proposal that reads with one voice, reflects the client’s world, and carries the confidence of an aligned team.

FROM FRICTION TO FLOW

RITA MASCIA



empathy
accountability
structure
recognition

In many bid environments, there is a familiar narrative: Sales engaged too late, SMEs and partners did not respond, or leadership did not prioritise the opportunity.

It is easy to frame stakeholder challenges as an “us vs them” problem. In reality, most stakeholders are not unwilling to help. Typically, stakeholders fall into three groups: those who want to help but lack time, those who engage only when chased, and those who genuinely enjoy bid work. I will admit the latter are a rarity!

It is useful to understand the reasons behind stakeholders’ behaviour. Sometimes it is the workload or unclear expectations. And sometimes it is a lack of visibility into how their contribution impacts revenue, growth, or even job security.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned is that stakeholder management should begin long before a bid arrives. If the first time someone hears from you is when you need content urgently, you have already introduced friction.

Strong relationships are built and maintained between bids through regular communication, feedback, and recognition. In one organisation, I introduced an internal newsletter showcasing how distinct functions supported bids. It changed perceptions. People began to see bid work as a shared success, not an interruption to their “real job”. Being featured in the newsletter meant their contribution was visible to the whole company.

A recurring challenge is that stakeholders do not always see the commercial impact of their input. When people understand that

a two-hour contribution could influence a multi-million-pound opportunity, priorities begin to shift.

Leadership visibility is equally important. I have seen the impact of a CEO participating in a review session. It reinforces that bidding is a business-critical activity.

Some friction points are structural rather than behavioural. I have worked in environments where key documentation sat on a technical SME’s personal drive despite the existence of shared platforms. Resolving this required leadership alignment to create systems that worked for everyone and saved time.

Poor communication, unclear responsibilities, and inefficient processes can quickly create friction across teams, partners, and suppliers.

Perhaps the most important lesson is recognising the pressures stakeholders are under. A senior clinical lead who micromanaged the bid team had not secured a win in two years. As trust developed, the relationship improved. The friction was due to a need for reassurance. Empathy is not a “soft skill” in bidding – it is fundamental.

There is no single solution to stakeholder challenges, but the most effective bid environments consistently combine empathy, accountability, structure, and recognition. Strong stakeholder relationships are not built during the final week before submission. They are developed gradually through trust, consistency, and shared understanding.

When that foundation exists, what once felt like friction becomes flow.



ANDY HAIGH

HARNESSING THE POWER

A senior manager called me, baffled at losing a bid she expected to win. The solution was excellent, the price competitive, the track record unmatched. “There must have been some jiggery-pokery,” she said.

When we debriefed, the same problems emerged. The bid was built in a silo. Sales intelligence never reached the document. SME content was brilliant but unscorable. Senior management rewrote the executive summary at the last minute. Stakeholder management is where most winnable contracts are lost.

EVERYONE HAS A DIFFERENT AGENDA – OUR JOB IS TO WORK WITH THEM

The most persistent myth in bidding is that all stakeholders want the same thing. They do not. Sales wants the win. SMEs want to be the expert. Senior management wants the contract with minimum disruption. Legal wants protection. The client’s evaluators just want to find what they need, score it, and go home. Treat them all the same way and you will spend the bid fighting people who should be on your side.

SALES: STOP WAITING TO BE INVITED

Bid professionals are invariably brought in too late. Stop waiting and go find the opportunity. Offer to facilitate the early capture session – not just attend it but run it. You will get early sight of the client’s real issues, the competitive landscape and the win strategy.

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS: THE PEOPLE WHO KNOW THE MOST AND TRY TO WRITE THE LEAST

SMEs are brilliant and essential but they disappear the moment you need them to write in plain English. Brief them on the scoring criteria, not just the question. Give them a heading structure before they start. Set the deadline two days ahead of your actual one. Your job is to translate between their expertise and the evaluator’s marking sheet. Own it. The bid that is easiest to win is the one you influenced before the responses were written.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT: PLANNED INVOLVEMENT BEATS REACTIVE INTERVENTION

Senior management can be your greatest asset or a serious liability – and sometimes both. Get sign-off on

the win strategy at kick-off. Brief them concisely at each key stage. When a late change is proposed, present the consequences calmly, with evidence. Most will back down unless they think you are just being territorial.

THE CLIENT’S EVALUATORS: MAKE IT EASY TO GIVE YOU TOP MARKS

When the ITT is published, direct relationship building closes. Evaluators will score what they can easily find and move on. Use their language. Use their questions as your headings. Answer elements in the order they were asked. Do not open with your company name or “We” – the moment you do, you have moved from solving their problem to selling your solution.

THE FINAL WORD

The difference between winning and a very good second place is rarely the quality of the solution. It is almost always the quality of the stakeholder relationships surrounding it. Build them before you need them. Because the moment you stop treating stakeholder management as a discipline, someone who is doing it properly will take your contract.



THE BIDDING CHAMELEON

MICHAEL BROWN

Just as a chameleon changes its colours to suit its background, a successful bidding team needs to pivot its approach depending on the stakeholder. This article looks at who the typical stakeholders are and how the bid team adapts its behaviour to those groups. We conclude by emphasising that pragmatism and adaptability is the key to bidding success.

INTRODUCTION

A good place to start is to use the RACI matrix in stakeholder mapping. Bidding teams often have the following stakeholders and our behaviour to each of these groups is clearly quite different.

RESPONSIBLE - (INTERNAL) BID AND DELIVERY TEAMS

The Responsible teams must collaborate. The bid team creates the bids and other related proposal submissions. The delivery team provides us with the pricing and delivery strategy. We work together to drive the submission. This requires flexibility, patience, and creativity. We are nimble, cooperative and laser focused on meeting deadlines.

ACCOUNTABLE - (INTERNAL) BUSINESS LEADS

For the Accountable teams, business leads are accountable for ensuring their areas are ready to respond to new bidding opportunities, including requests for proposals, prequalifications, presentations and any

other client-led requirements. The bidding function supports this by maintaining the availability and systems setup to be able to react swiftly and reliably. We need to be dependable and steadfast.

CONSULTED - (INTERNAL) GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS AND REGIONAL LEADS

For global headquarters and regional leads, we are a different beast. We are the custodian of brand, of internal governance and the driver of constant quality. We need to have the data correct and at our fingertips. The consulted stakeholder is not in the weeds so needs to feel secure in the knowledge that the bid team is on top of everything that is being submitted. We need to enable the consulted to have that crucial helicopter view.

INFORMED - (EXTERNAL) CLIENT DECISION MAKERS AND PROCUREMENT TEAMS

External clients sit nicely in this category. We engage with client decision makers with fluidity and calm. Our output is consistent and reactive. We are the swan, gliding seamlessly across the water (whilst unbeknown to them frantically working to keep up under the surface!).

THE BIDDING CHAMELEON

The ability to wear all these hats at any one time is the key to success. The bidding chameleon has no room for dogmatism, as a frustrated stakeholder is not an easy relationship to manage. Instead, a flexible approach and the ability to align with the differing agendas of the various stakeholders leads to the bid team being reliable and depended upon to deliver results, internally and externally.





BIDDING LESSONS FROM A VIENNESE PALACE

JON WILLIAMS

In Vienna for Eurovision recently, I was lucky enough to stay in one of my favourite hotels.

The Imperial was opened by the Emperor Franz Joseph. Guests have included JFK, Emperor Hirohito and the Queen (the real one, not Camilla!). If it is good enough for them, it is good enough for me!

Why has it been so successful for 150+ years? Partly, the building is spectacular: it is a former palace. But mainly it is because of the service. They anticipate your needs. The experience feels personalised. And they make you smile.

In other words – they are wonderful at stakeholder management.

Bid and proposal functions need to be more like The Imperial. It is too easy for us to moan that “the C-suite do not take us seriously”, “Sales did not engage us early enough” or “Our SMEs never deliver what we need when we need it”.

What would The Imperial do? They would work out what would delight each of the guests around the bid table.

Alison in the C-suite does not want to hear that you are working weekends. She wants to know how you can contribute to the organisation’s growth – and be confident that you are winning and retaining good business.

Alex in the sales team just wants to win. They have seen you work late into the night, so assume that is what you do. That they might forewarn you of an upcoming bid, or that you could add value if they did, would not cross their mind. And a salesperson tied to a desk is not a salesperson in their natural habitat, out with customers.

And Amina, your main technical expert, does get that today’s bid is tomorrow’s project. But she is your SME precisely because she is the “expert” – she is under pressure delivering services for your existing clients. Her time is tight. She is not a confident writer: proposals slightly scare her.

And yet we blaze in with the entitled expectation that they will all jump when we say jump. Is it any wonder that we see friction and stress?

That we will be able to steer them using true best practices should go without saying. But the success of any bid and proposal function at the macro level surely comes down to understanding your stakeholders’ aspirations and designing a service that will delight them.

And success on any individual bid depends on truly understanding the people you are working with – their motivators, their comfort levels, their constraints. And then seeking to lead, not merely manage.

So let us stop complaining – and let us bring some of The Imperial’s empathy, polish, and joie de vivre to the art of bidding and the task of winning.



UNCORK THE SME BOTTLENECK AND COLLABORATE SMARTER

**DARRELL
WOODWARD**



WHY SMES PUSH BACK

I feel for our SMEs. They have full-time jobs building products, managing risk, advising clients, fixing problems or protecting the business. Some facilitate optimised stakeholder-aligned thought leadership. No idea what that is, but it sounds important!

They have got their own work to do, then they are pulled into a bid, handed urgent questions, and given deadlines that override their schedules. "Working on RFPs" probably is not in their job description. Is it any wonder their weary response is: "Can't you just look at the last proposal?"

THE BOTTLENECK IS A FLOW PROBLEM

They are not difficult. They are rational. Proposal teams are under pressure to respond quickly and accurately. That lands on SMEs too. 49% of us cite SME collaboration as a top challenge, 48% struggle with SME delays and 46% with finding content. The bottleneck is not usually willingness. It is how the work flows. To uncork it, we must understand our impact on SMEs, make their lives easier, and use their expertise better.

THE HIDDEN POWER OF THE KNOWLEDGE BASE

We often see pre-written content as a way to help bid teams respond faster. A good bid library is not boilerplate. Instead, we need curated answer components from which we craft great proposal content. It saves time, protects core messaging, and keeps legal and compliance teams happy. The best knowledge bases are not dusty shelves of "stuff we once submitted". They are governed, searchable, owned and maintained. And AI makes this even more important. We want better answers and we need people to trust them. Otherwise, it helps us make faster mistakes at scale. Efficiently wrong is still wrong!

CHANGE THE ASK, CHANGE THE RELATIONSHIP

The same knowledge base proposal teams use to find content can also help our SMEs. Instead of asking someone to create answers under deadline pressure, we ask them to validate answers we already have. It asks less of their time and more of their judgement. SMEs own accuracy. Proposal teams own usability.

I have seen this work in a large organisation where multiple commercial teams repeatedly asked specialists for the same answers. Those duplicate requests now flow through a centralised knowledge base. Specialists maintain the source content, while response teams reuse the latest approved version and only return when judgement or a genuine update is needed.

START WITH REPEATED QUESTIONS

Identify 20–30 questions, agree owners, set review cycles, and make the latest approved answer easy to reuse. You do not need to boil the ocean. Just stop boiling the same kettle every week.

A BETTER BIDDING CULTURE

For SMEs, the benefit is fewer repeated questions, less stress, and more time for their actual job. For the business, useful knowledge stops living in busy people's heads.

A knowledge base says: "We value your time. We will only come to you when your judgement is needed." That is how we uncork the bottleneck. Not by chasing harder, but by collaborating smarter

FINDING A RHYTHM

BELLA STEVENSON

FINDING A RHYTHM WITH STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IS SIGNIFICANT. FINDING A REALISTIC RHYTHM IS FAR MORE VALUABLE FOR ACHIEVING POSITIVE BID OUTCOMES.

I love a well-structured umbrella bid process as much as the next bid professional. However, when working with technical teams and engaging with internal stakeholders regularly for the greater good (the good being a high-quality bid submission in this instance), I have often engaged in what I like to call “micro-processes” within that larger bid framework. These consist of applying an individual strategy with each technical expert to ensure we jointly achieve the best result.

Even though it is important for technical stakeholders to have a broad understanding of a bid process, key gateways and why we, as bid professionals, ask the type of questions we do, there is

not a “one size fits all” approach when working with them. The high-scoring bid submissions will always have the competitive advantage, whether through robust project evidence, meaningful statistics or client testimonials that all point to you being the supplier of choice. Of course, none of these elements would be possible without the expertise and collaborative input of your technical teams.

It is important, particularly as a bid writer, to establish the most productive way to obtain these winning elements. These micro-processes do not need to be complicated, formal or overly structured. Instead, they should be grounded in strong communication, allowing the technical

expert to fully buy into the importance of carefully crafted bid responses.

More often than not, it takes practice and a bit of trial and error to find the most productive way of engaging with internal stakeholders. We need to assess their communication style, time constraints, client knowledge and general understanding of bids.

Some stakeholders prefer interview-style techniques, offering fantastic client insights that can be woven into the bid over a quick cup of coffee. Others favour a bid professional’s comments on a document that they can take away, reflect on and respond to accordingly (all within a reasonable bid deadline timeframe, of

course). Some internal stakeholders even prefer more formal processes such as diarised workshops and storyboard sessions to get the most out of bid engagement.

It is important to establish communication preferences early on, whichever method(s) an internal stakeholder favours. Just as a bid professional supports the strategy and approach of the bid from the outset, it is equally vital to ascertain how best to liaise with technical stakeholders – and to retain the ability to adapt if the approach is not working or if their external factors change.

Finding a rhythm with stakeholder engagement is significant. Finding a realistic rhythm is far more valuable for achieving positive bid outcomes.

WHY OPERATIONAL TEAMS MATTER IN REBIDS

NIGEL THACKER

We already work with a range of stakeholders in bids. But rebids introduce a stakeholder group that is rarely involved in new business pursuits: the operational team currently delivering the contract.

Operational teams shape the customer's perception of our organisation as the incumbent. Their culture, responsiveness, and behaviours influence the customer's view of "what it is like to work with us" – a silent evaluation criterion in any rebid.

The delivery team's insight is indispensable for us as bidders in charge of the rebid. They hold the lived experience of the service, and the tacit knowledge that does not appear in reports.

Rebids also require operational change. Those changes will be delivered by the same team, so their willingness and capacity to adapt is a risk factor. Internal politics and incentives can also shape how openly they share information with you.

All of this makes building trust with the team early essential if you are going to get what you need from the relationship to help win the rebid.

HOW TO BUILD THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

Ideally, you will build and maintain them throughout the contract period – not always easy for a busy bid team.

Sometimes you can do that through instituting annual or mid-contract reviews to check progress and direction of delivery vs changing needs.

If you have not kept in touch, start "rebuilding" your relationships with the team early.

Many operational leads will never have been through a rebid. By explaining the process clearly, you can help them understand the task ahead – and how your expertise will help them through each stage. A structured engagement plan helps: early insight sessions, data reviews, solution workshops, and regular check-ins. This reduces anxiety and prevents the rebid from feeling like an additional burden dropped on an already stretched team.

Bring in an operational colleague who has recently been through a rebid. Hearing the process from a peer can reassure the team more effectively than a bidder explaining the theory.

Be flexible about who your main liaison is. The contract lead may be too busy and a deputy manager or supervisor may have more time and can treat the role as a development opportunity. They can help you navigate contract file structures, gather information informally, and translate operational language into bid-ready insight.

Finally, create space for honesty. Some great case study material may have been forgotten or just be seen as "what we do". Past problems might be glossed over. You need both the successes and the scars to build a credible, compelling rebid. Getting that sort of detail will not happen if you do not build your relationships early.



CORE STRENGTH

SARAH HINGHLIFFE

As a freelancer, my key to stakeholder management has consistently been to create a strong core team up front. This team is my rock, and we hold each other to account to get a high-quality bid out the door on time. I never start a bid without this core team in place and with sufficient time committed by them.

My core team comprises a lead for each contributing function. In my case, in the technology industry, this will typically comprise:

- A senior manager who is sponsoring the opportunity through the bid process
- The salesperson who owns the opportunity and will advise on the win strategy and coordinate the commercial deal
- A technical lead who owns the solution design
- A delivery lead who owns the solution implementation approach
- A legal eagle who will act as counsel

I manage tasks and timelines, lead the development of a compelling bid, and hold overall accountability. Ideally, I have administration support for portal and document management.

The first step with the core team is to confirm their roles and responsibilities. We then identify any additional resources required, including content contributors, peer reviewers, the final-document review team, and those involved in the governance and approval process. Each of us takes responsibility for managing the relevant people. This way, we divide the elephant into manageable chunks, establish individual and collective accountability, and set the framework for effective stakeholder engagement as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Framework for efficient stakeholder management

An approach that capitalises on existing relationships and forums and creates collective accountability



I always hold a kick-off meeting – the one event that everyone is invited to. Each core team member has a slot on the agenda to share an overview of their role and perspective. This reinforces their accountability.

For anyone invited but unable to attend, I arrange a separate event or a personal briefing, because it is vital that we get off on the right foot and have buy-in from everyone from the start. I document the kick-off and send it to everyone.

Post kick-off, the core team members are responsible for advancing their respective elements of the proposal. Regular checkpoints involve only the core team. We check task progress, new information, risks and issues, and the timeline's viability, and I make the necessary adjustments.

I document every checkpoint and circulate it to everyone. But mindful that an email is not guaranteed to be read, understood, or remembered, I ensure we all maintain direct engagement with our respective stakeholders and mitigate any concerns.

My watchwords are check, communicate, manage, mitigate – continuously.

Maybe I am fortunate to have had well-behaved clients, but whether by good luck or good management, they have bought into this approach.

“TELL US HOW TO MAKE THIS BETTER”

TONY BIRCH

The most effective reviews begin with a simple mindset: “Tell us how to make this better”. When reviewers focus on improving the material rather than judging it, reviews become a positive, collaborative exercise that strengthens both the submission and the team. A good review will bring internal stakeholders together, not tear them apart.

Bringing together the right internal stakeholders amplifies this effect, combining diverse perspectives to ensure the final submission is robust, credible, and aligned with how the organisation will deliver.



Involving stakeholders from delivery, commercial, technical, and leadership teams builds shared ownership. When people contribute their expertise, they are more invested in the quality of the submission and the success of the pursuit.

Selecting the right reviewers is therefore critical. Reviews should involve people whose opinions are trusted and who can assess content from the customer’s perspective. Availability alone is not enough. Reviewers should be chosen for their insight and ability to add value.

PREPARING REVIEWERS FOR SUCCESS

Preparation sets the tone for a productive review. Every session should begin with clarity on:

- What is being reviewed
- The stage in the process
- The outcomes required

Reviews exist to add value, not to criticise. Setting a positive, collaborative tone is essential.

To enable this meaningful input, provide context on the win strategy and customer priorities, assign clear areas of focus for each reviewer, and encourage reviewers to prepare in advance of the review. Where possible, allow reviewers to share and discuss views to avoid conflicting feedback.

STRUCTURING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Effective reviews depend on actionable feedback. Reviewers should:

- Offer clear recommendations, not just observations
- Focus on strengths, gaps, and responsiveness
- Suggest improvements, rather than highlight faults

Constructive recommendations are far more valuable than vague or negative comments.

Feedback only adds value when it is used well. All recommendations should be captured and considered, but the core team must decide which actions best support the win strategy. This disciplined approach helps to:

- Track and consolidate feedback
- Resolve conflicting inputs
- Prioritise actions by impact
- Communicate decisions clearly

When the right stakeholders are engaged and reviewers are well prepared, reviews become more than a checkpoint, they become a competitive advantage, leading to stronger submissions and better results.



What is the most appropriate collective noun for a group of proposal stakeholders? A tangle? An expectation? A concern? A cacophony?

The answer matters less than the reality they describe. Stakeholders, even when on the same team, are often at odds. Finance wants to push the margin. Legal wants to eradicate risk. Operations want delivery certainty. Bid writers just want to win. Something, sooner or later, must give.

Scroll through LinkedIn and you might believe there is a magic cream that can soothe away these tensions and ease you to a collegiate utopia. Bad news: there is not one. Most suppliers are, to some degree, clunky – and arguably need to be.

So where does that leave us? Let us take one universal battleground: proofreading.

Proofreading a bid is where ten people already agree that the answer is perfect, but then still change the same sentence in ten different ways.

Too often, stakeholders review without sight of the specification or scoring criteria. The result is predictable: feedback driven by instinct rather than intent, opinion rather than outcome. It is simultaneously both essential and contradictory, and only ever arrives five minutes before submission.

There is also an unwritten rule that stakeholders must add a sufficient weight of comments, changes, and fingerprints to justify their involvement, whether warranted or not. And, yes, like you, I have been guilty of these crimes.

The fundamental question every proofreader should ask instead is simple: will this edit make the bid more likely to win? A second question should follow immediately: have I been clear enough for the writer to act on it?

Vague comments like “I would not say it like that” or “We should soften the language” invariably leave writers pulling their hair out (and in my case that is already in very short supply).

Instead, we want stakeholders to guide us as to whether this is a must change or a could change. If more detail is needed, what should be removed to make room? If clarity is lacking, what would “good” look like?

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING IS IN THE WRITING

**JIM
CARLEY**

At its worst, stakeholder feedback is proof that everyone has read the bid, albeit not necessarily the same one. All too often the discipline of good proofreading is overlooked.

A little education, knowledge, and guidance to make stakeholders better proofreaders inevitably makes the writers better, well, writers. Stakeholders make clearer and stronger challenges. The writer better

appreciates (and pre-empts) the concerns from the stakeholder’s hilltop. Review cycles become more efficient.

Better proofreading does not just improve bids. It improves how stakeholders work together to win them. And if you can win that battle, then you are well on your way.



BEYOND THE KEYBOARD: WHY HUMAN CONNECTION STILL WINS BIDS

**KEN
ERSKINE**

When I reflect on my 40+ year career in bidding, it is not particularly the c.£38bn of wins I remember most – it is the people.

That is why the dehumanising aspect of our digital working world worries me. Email, virtual meetings, social media and AI have transformed the way we network, research and submit bids – in many ways for the better. But is there a risk that, amid all the digital noise and efficiency gains, we are forgetting what really wins work?

Genuine human connection.

So, what can we do to ensure that, while embracing intelligent, targeted use of AI and other digital tools, we do not lose the trust, understanding and relationships that deliver success?

KEEP TALKING

When issues arise on a bid, nothing beats a direct conversation. Recently, a quiet coffee chat turned a potentially high-risk contract into a simple agreement. No drama, no legal wrangling, just respectful, behind-the-scenes dialogue that concluded in a mutually beneficial solution.

Tip: If you sense friction or confusion, pick up the phone or arrange a meeting. Building relationships during capture eases honest dialogue.

BE MINDFUL OF EVERYTHING YOU SAY

Buyers are human and make decisions emotionally – logic follows feeling in bidding. Every stakeholder interaction, whether it is a call, email, DM or meeting, shapes their view of you and your bid. And remember, anything you say on social media can be

screenshotted and shared with anyone – including evaluators.

Tip: Even as a freelancer, consider your words carefully and think twice before posting online about procurement bodies – people will link your exemplary client case studies with your professional opinion posts.

INHABIT YOUR CLIENT'S WORLD

Major frameworks and high-value bids are not won on technical merit alone. Success comes from understanding the client's world – their pressures, priorities and hidden concerns. For a year before the release of a bid for a multi-billion-pound framework, my team used structured relationship mapping to get to know decision-makers, influencers and gatekeepers. When our proposal landed, key stakeholders saw their priorities reflected – even “unwritten” issues not in scoring criteria.

Tip: Map key roles in your client's organisation early, engage stakeholders personally and test your understanding of priorities before drafting your bid. A standardised, AI-driven approach will not work.

STAY AUTHENTIC

Which brings me to the final point – in our digital world, do not let AI and social media replace authenticity and genuine relationships. If you rely too much on digital tools, you risk eroding trust and reducing personal connections to binary transactions.

Tip: Maximise the potential of AI and social media for research, data analysis and networking, but follow up online interactions with personal engagement.

Remember: people buy from people, not from avatars or algorithms.

COACHING - ACTION THROUGH UNDERSTANDING

GEMMA
WARING

Stakeholder engagement is not the simple process people think it is: send an email, explain what you need, get the information. In reality, reluctance to engage happens for a variety of reasons. More often it is about competing pressures, previous experiences, uncertainty, or fear of getting it wrong rather than not wanting to be helpful.

That is where coaching skills can make a real difference.

Coaching qualifications demonstrate the importance of understanding the “why” behind behaviour before trying to change it. If we pause and explore what is driving negative responses, the conversation changes significantly.

A stakeholder who repeatedly delays getting back to you may not be uninterested; they may feel overwhelmed by workload or unclear about expectations. A technical expert who appears dismissive may have experienced poorly managed bids in the past where their time was wasted. A senior leader who avoids decision-making may simply lack confidence in the information they have been given.

When we approach stakeholder engagement with curiosity instead of frustration, we create opportunities to coach by stealth.

This does not mean formally coaching colleagues; it is about using coaching techniques in everyday conversations to get what you need.

For example:

I need this by Friday



Is Friday realistic alongside your current priorities?

It will not take you too long



When do you think you can turn this around by?

Can you update this section?



Which part would you be best placed to shape? I thought this section...

We need sign-off urgently



What information would give you confidence to approve this?

I have chased this three times



Is there anything making this difficult for you to progress?

You are not supporting this bid



What concerns do you have about this opportunity?

What you have given me does not answer the question



Would it help if I went through the question with you so you know what I am looking for?

That feedback is not very helpful



Could you talk me through your thinking a bit more?

Can everyone send comments by end of day?



What is the best way for us to gather input quickly?

Just put down whatever you think



Would it help if I drafted a starting point for you?

Proactive stakeholder engagement is not about chasing harder. It is about listening actively, understanding barriers, and acting on feedback. In complex bidding environments, the ability to show empathy, build trust, and adapt collaboratively leads to stronger relationships, better information flow, and more resilient bid outcomes.



WHY STAKEHOLDERS DON'T DO WHAT YOU ASKED

CERI MESCALL

STAKEHOLDERS

Proposals professionals spend a lot of time trying to motivate stakeholders. Better briefings. Earlier asks. Stronger escalation paths. It works sometimes. It also fails a lot of the time.

Behavioural economics explains why. More importantly, it gives you something more reliable to work with. These patterns show up differently depending on who you are working with. But the mechanics do not change.

LOSS AVERSION

People feel losses more strongly than gains. On most proposals, the gap between first and second is small. A few percentage points is common.

Stakeholders who understand that behave differently. Most contribution requests focus on what a win could achieve. That is abstract. Be specific about what a weak contribution costs.

STATUS QUO BIAS

People default to whatever takes the least effort. On a proposal, that usually means recycled content, late inputs, or something that fills the space without earning the score. Contribution quality tracks the quality of the ask. Not the character of the contributor. You can push standards. Or you can make it easier to respond well. The second works more often.

ANCHORING

Your first ask sets the standard. "Write the technical section" gets you a technical section. "How would you actually deliver this, and why would a client pick you over anyone else?" gets you something usable. You have already set an anchor before you realise it. Set it deliberately.

PRESENT BIAS

People prioritise what is in front of them. A bid outcome in six months does not feel real. A performance conversation next month does. The most consistent contributors are the ones who can see a clear link between the pursuit and something they are already measured on. Tie the ask to what matters now.

THE PEAK-END RULE

Most contributors never get a clear read on their input. They hear the final result. That is it. A win makes everything feel right. A loss makes everything feel wrong. Neither reflects the actual contribution. Calling out what someone's input achieved, regardless of outcome, changes how they show up next time.

The "us vs them" narrative is easy to default to. Stakeholders are unresponsive, disengaged, and hard to work with. A more useful question: what conditions are we creating? Before your next bid kicks off, look at these five patterns. Which ones are you shaping on purpose? And which ones are you leaving to chance?



ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



PIPPA BIRCH

Pippa owns award-winning Pipster Solutions Ltd and has over 20 years bid writing experience, mainly in highways and civil engineering. She is an active member of the Institute of Asphalt and has won several industry awards. She is APMP Professional certified and mentors other bid professionals, winning Contribution to the Profession in 2022. She also developed #ThursdayThrong and #BidBites – free online meetings for the bidding community to reduce isolation.



TONY BIRCH

Tony Birch is the founder and current Chairman of Shipley Limited in the UK. Tony served on the main board of the APMP for four years and was elected a Fellow of the organisation in 2006, for his work in developing and launching the APMP's Certification Programme. Since founding Shipley, Tony has trained thousands of sales and bid professionals around the world.



JEREMY BRIM

Jeremy works with leadership teams and business owners as a consultant and advisor to plan and deliver sustainable growth through analysis and interventions across the sales cycle. Jeremy has also taken on leadership of the Bid Toolkit, bringing with him a wealth of bidding knowledge and desire to help businesses of all sizes improve their win rates.



MICHAEL BROWN

Michael Brown is a seasoned bid professional having won multiple projects across the built environment throughout Europe, the Middle East, APAC and North America. He is passionate about leading global teams to deliver top quality proposals and pitches to multinational clients.



JIM CARLEY

Jim Carley is the Business Development Director for Shaw Trust, a national charity providing employability, education, and independence support primarily for people with disabilities and limiting health conditions. He was formerly the Founder and Managing Director of Carley Consult, an award-winning bid consultancy, which he subsequently sold, and has over 25 years' experience in proposal writing and bid management.



JAVIER ESCARTIN

Javier is an aerospace engineer who has climbed the corporate ladder from engineering to business development. He is a full-time freelance Proposal Manager and has recently launched a business to make our work easier with artificial intelligence. He is the founder of DeepRFP.com, runs the proposals newsletter jescartin.com, and manages proposals for worldwide technology companies as a consultant.



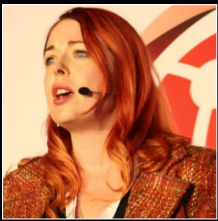
NINA CHRISTIANSEN

Nina is an experienced leader in strategic partnerships, project and bid management with a strong background in international technology, alliances, stakeholder engagement and professional membership bodies. She is skilled in building collaborative ecosystems, managing complex projects and events, developing partnership strategies, and bringing structure, commercial focus and human connection to multifaceted business environments.



ANDY HAIGH

Andy is an expert in bidding and tendering, specialising in competitive formal bids into EU Public Sector organisations. He is an authority on EU procurement legislation and can bring all these capabilities together to initiate and drive major complex bids through to a successful completion.



LARISSA CORNELIUS

With over 14 years in business development and proposal consultancy, Larissa offers bid expertise across various industries. She has trained thousands of people and worked with over 260 companies on strategic bid work. She has a further seven years of operational management expertise and actively promotes the proposal profession by combining proposal best practices with her operational and sales background, helping businesses win more.



SARAH HINCHLIFFE

Sarah labels herself a 'Storyteller, Organiser, Timekeeper'. After a 30-year sales career in the IT industry, Sarah decided to share what she'd learnt about winning business using great stories, a systematic approach and consistently delivering on time. She continues learning and sharing through her freelance consulting work and volunteering as a writer, speaker and mentor.



NIGEL DENNIS

Nigel has been called a proposal pioneer in Australia for his work in shaping the professional bidding landscape in the region. He has three decades of proposal consulting experience and has trained thousands of people. Nigel started the APMP Australia New Zealand Chapter, runs Australia's largest specialist bid consultancy and is a strong advocate for development of the profession.



REBECCA LINK

Rebecca is a transformational leader, trainer, and orals coach with over 14 years' experience leading cross-functional teams in proposal management, technical writing, and strategic growth. An advocate for AI innovation, she blends best practice with a passion for team empowerment, driving corporate buy-in and successful outcomes. Rebecca is known for fostering high-performance cultures while supporting aggressive growth initiatives.



KEN ERSKINE

Ken is an experienced work-winning, bid and business development leader with a strong background in major projects, submissions strategy, opportunity selection and customer-focused value propositions. He has built and led high-performing teams, securing major new business, improving bid cultures, mentoring proposal professionals and using business improvement approaches to drive efficiency, productivity and stronger commercial outcomes.



RITA MASCIA

Rita is a proven bid strategist with 25 years of experience turning proposals into wins. Working internationally and now fully remotely from Italy, she excels in guiding bid writing, bid management, capture, and contract negotiations across diverse sectors. Passionate about bringing clarity to complex RFPs, Rita helps clients win government and commercial contracts without sacrificing common sense.



NIGEL THACKER

Nigel has been a leader in our profession for over two decades and now runs Rebidding Solutions. He has published two books on rebidding and has presented at APMP events and conferences in the UK and USA. He has trained managers in bidding and wider management skills across the globe, created the online course 'Management and Leadership Skills for Bidders' under the mybidcareer branding and is a mentor on the APMP UK Rapport mentoring programme.



ALANA MCCARTHY

Alana is Head of Bids and Marketing for a tier one construction company. She has 20 years' experience in public sector bidding within the construction, facilities management, and transactional banking industries. With a passion for lifelong learning, Alana recently completed a Level 7 Apprenticeship in Senior Leadership and has embarked on a MSc with a focus on the bidding function to drive research into our profession.



GEMMA WARING

Gemma has been a dynamic force in tendering and procurement for 20 years. Her commitment to excellence, determination to succeed and passion for empowering others has resulted in exceptional career achievements. She is a key player in the roll out of the Procurement Act 2023 and was a recent Runner Up in the APMP UK's annual awards in the Supplier of the Year category.



CERI MESCALL

Ceri is Managing Director of Strategic Proposals Canada and an experienced bid and proposal professional with 20 years in high-stakes pursuits. An APMP Fellow, APMP Approved Trainer, ISP Fellow and APMP 40 Under 40 award winner, she supports teams with win strategy, reviews and presentation coaching. Through her writing for Bidding Quarterly and BQ Tech, she shares insights drawn from real bids – exploring what genuinely improves clarity, differentiation, and decision making in competitive pursuits.



JON WILLIAMS

Jon and his team work with clients worldwide to help them establish winning proposal capabilities and to capture major deals. He has built and led numerous bid and proposal centres; managed, reviewed and benchmarked countless proposals; worked in over 35 countries; and trained many thousands of course participants.



MARTIN SMITH

Martin is passionate about helping clients win new business. With increasingly savvy procurement professionals, more competition and new technology changing the way we bid, it is his job as Managing Director to ensure Bid Solutions provides market leading people, tools, training and solutions to help you win more.



DARRELL WOODWARD

Darrell Woodward is an award-winning consultant helping organisations unleash the full power of proposal automation to win more business faster. As a Bid Geek and coffee lover, he believes technology in bidding is about combining the right blend of content beans – compelling narratives, tailored solutions, and persuasive arguments – and the expertise of bidding baristas to craft the perfect proposal brew.



BELLA STEVENSON

Bella began her bids career 14 years ago with a recruitment consultancy, co-ordinating EMEA submissions. For the past 10 years she has been a Bid Manager, mainly in the built environment but also in facilities management, security and dentistry. She enjoys working with technical teams through workshops and reviews to build win themes, embed best practice and encourage creative thinking, helping organisations win more contracts and achieve their business development objectives.

FRICITIONLESS

ISSUE NO. 25
JUNE 2026



Brought to you by
Bid Solutions
Connecting Winners

+44 (0)20 8158 3952
enquiry@bidsolutions.com
bidsolutions.com

Design by
FMA
CREATIVE AGENCY